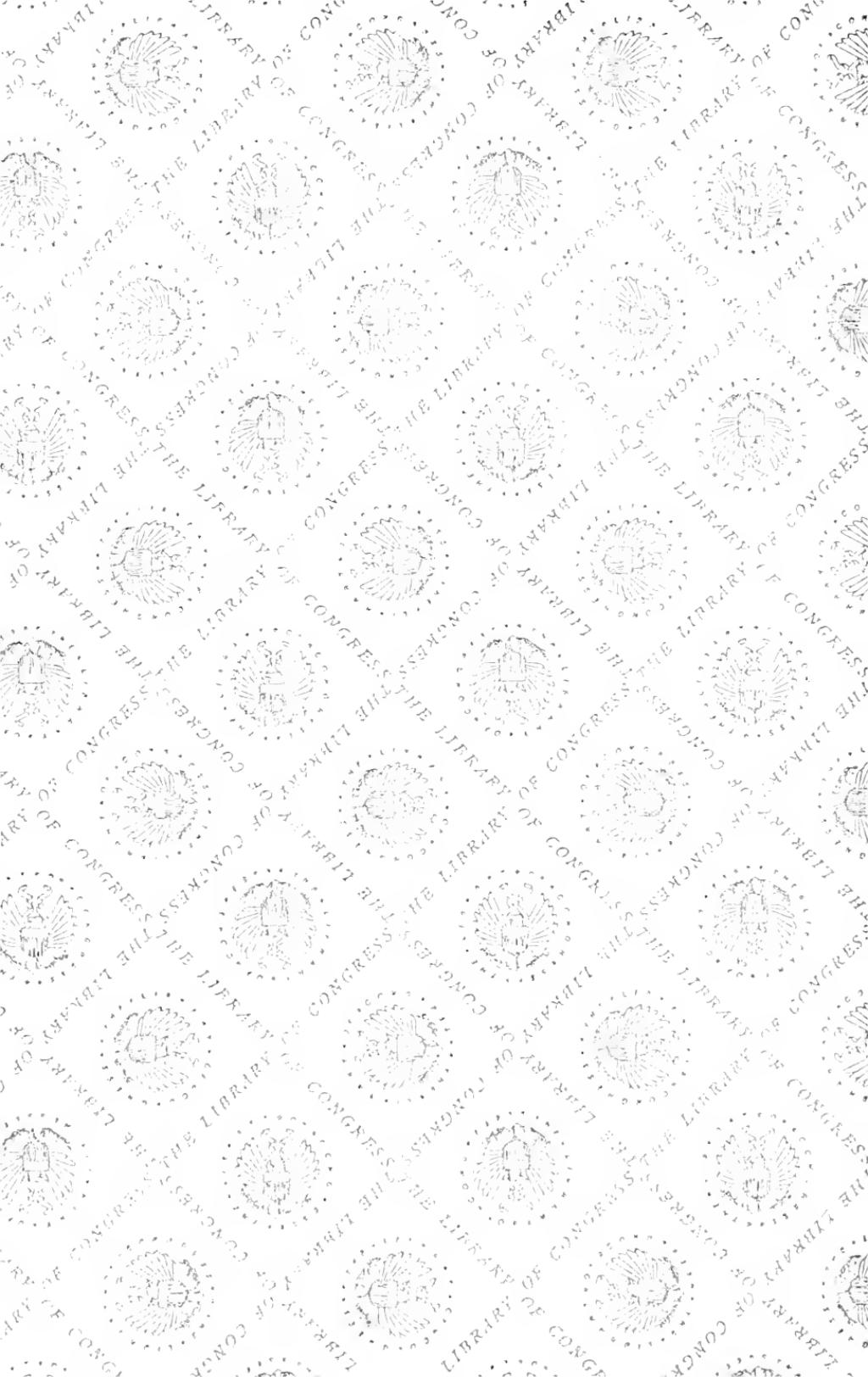


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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN.

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THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA.  
A COMMEMORATION ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN UNIVERSITY HALL, OCTOBER 21, 1892,

By the Invitation of the University Senate.

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B. A. HINSDALE, LL. D.

Professor of the Science and the Art of Teaching.

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# THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA.

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*Gentlemen of the University Senate:*

The great event that we have assembled to commemorate came on a flood-tide of great events. In 1453 the Turks took Constantinople, thereby putting an end to the Roman Empire and extinguishing the pharos of learning that had burned on the Bosphorus through the Middle Ages, but also scattering the Greek scholars over Europe and contributing to the revival of letters. In 1454 some printer at Mayence, perhaps Gutenberg, published the thirty-one line indulgence, thus demonstrating the art of printing with movable types. In 1487 Dias discovered the Cape of Good Hope, which Da Gama doubled ten years later on his great voyage to the Indies. In 1492 the Western Mohammedan Empire came to an end. In 1517 Luther nailed his theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg and began the Protestant Reformation. In 1519-1522 Magellan sailed through the strait that bears his name, named and crossed the Pacific Ocean, and not only touched hands with Da Gama but made the first circumnavigation. In 1543 Copernicus published his "De Orbium Revolutionibus," thus preparing the way for Galileo, Kepler, and Newton. Within the limits of these years other things of great importance were done. Latin and Greek letters were practically restored to men, modern art attained its highest perfection, the boundaries of knowledge were immensely expanded, mental freedom was gained, and the human mind born again. With all the rest, civilization changed front; hitherto it had faced the Mediterranean Sea, henceforth it faces the Atlantic Ocean. Well might Humboldt ask where in the history of nations we can find another epoch fraught with such triumphs of the human mind. The New World was not, indeed, uncovered and placed in the clear

light of knowledge at any one time, or by any one man; it was a process rather than an act, occupying many years and enlisting many agents, but the transaction of October 12, 1492, so far transcends all the rest that historians have appropriately given it the name that in strictness belongs to the whole series,—THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA.

In the long series of antecedents culminating in this discovery, scientific ideas and practical achievements are so blended that it is hard to tell which of the two contribute most to the interest of the story. At a university commemoration, certainly, it would be unpardonable not to give the scientific elements due recognition.

Knowledge of the earth has been widened mainly by war, commerce, missionary undertakings, and travel; but the facts that the soldier, the trader, the missionary, and the traveler have collected, students have always stood ready to systematize. More narrowly, the History of Geography presents four stages of progress: (1) Certain facts are observed or discovered; (2) from these data a general conception or theory is deduced; (3) additional facts are accumulated; (4) this new material is distributed according to the old theory or scheme, or compels the formation of a new one.

The first men to frame a theory of the earth represented it as a flat, disc-like surface of small area. We read of the “circle of the earth” in the prophecy of Isaiah, and of a “compass upon the face of the depth” in the Proverbs. The world of Homer is a circle, having Greece as a center, drawn with a radius long enough to include Asia Minor, the Valley of the Lower Nile, and most of Italy, the whole surrounded by the Ocean. How naturally this conception came to the mind of the primitive geographer, we cannot fail to see the moment we put ourselves in his place. To the unscientific mind seeing is believing; and Sir John Herschel very justly observes that “almost all of the conclusions of astronomy stand in open and striking contradiction with those of superficial and vulgar observation and with what appears to every one, until he has understood and weighed the proofs to the contrary, the most positive evidence of his senses.”

Time compelled the abandonment of the disc theory and the creation of a new one. Cold shut out from the north the races that contributed to geographical knowledge and heat shut them out from the south, while within the two oceans east and west they encountered no insuperable mete or bound. The relations of the three old continents to one another and to the waters that furnished the theaters of commerce—the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean—gave to history an east-and-west movement. The Phœnicians laid one hand upon India and the other upon Britain. As a result, the men who now thought out the problem conceived of the earth as a flat, trencher-like surface of much greater extent from east to west than from north to south. Traces of this theory are thickly scattered over the pages of ancient literature, and we have survivals of it in the terms “latitude” and “longitude” still in current use.

Still fuller knowledge compelled the abandonment of the parallelogram theory. Men who became somewhat emancipated from superficial and vulgar observation, saw the heavenly bodies in different positions in different latitudes, at different hours of the day and at different seasons of the year; they saw day and night varying in length with latitude and with the season; they saw that the shadow cast by the earth in eclipses of the moon is round, and that ships “hull down” as they go out to sea. In these observations originated the central ideas of geographical and astronomical science, the sphericity of the earth and its revolution around the sun. Whether he originated these ideas or not, they bore in antiquity the name of Pythagoras, and more than two thousand years later Galileo was condemned for teaching “a false Pythagorean notion.” On the conception of the sphericity of the earth, such men as Eratosthenes, Hipparchus, and Ptolemy built up the system known to scholars as the Greek Geography. To be more definite, this geography may be described as follows: (1) The ancients accumulated a great mass of geographical material; (2) they developed the spherical theory of the earth; (3) they systematized the materials that they accumulated; (4) they invented a complete geographical apparatus, maps, globes, parallels and meridians.

ians, zones and equator, projections, and the accepted division of the circle. As to the relations of the earth and the sun, the Greek philosophers were not agreed.

The known world when the Graeco-Roman civilization had reached its culmination was quadrilateral in form, lying northwest and southeast. Roughly speaking, a right line drawn from the southern tip of Scandinavia to the northern end of the Caspian Sea, and thence to the mouth of the Ganges, was its northern boundary, and a similar line connecting Cape Non and Cape Guardafui, and thence extending eastward, its southern boundary. This world covered some sixty degrees of latitude, and twice that extent of longitude. Within these limits, however, were extensive regions of which the best informed men knew little or nothing; while the relations of the world that they knew to the world that they did not know, was then an insolvable problem. Two antagonistic theories were evolved, the Oceanic and the Continental. Eratosthenes, starting perhaps from the Homeric notion of a circumfluent ocean, held that all the seas and oceans were connected. Among the writers who held this theory was Pomponius Mela, who maintained, in his treatise written about the year 50 A. D., that the only obstacle to the circumnavigation of Africa was the intense heat of the torrid zone. Hipparchus, and still more strongly Ptolemy, repelled the idea of outside oceans, and made land the connecting tissue of the surface of the earth. Ptolemy believed in the indefinite northward and eastward extension of Asia, and a similar southward extension of Africa; he even went so far as to maintain that the two continents came together in the far southeast, thus holding the Indian Ocean in their firm embrace. How very different were these two theories, a glance at the maps of the world according to Mela and Ptolemy will show. The first was evidently much the more favorable to maritime adventure and discovery; and it is pertinent to observe that the great discoverers and geographers of modern times belong to the lineage of Eratosthenes and not of Ptolemy. And yet it was Ptolemy who gave the Greek geography its final shaping, and who controlled for centuries the thinking of scientific men on these subjects.

Those who accepted the Greek geography, at least those who leaned to the Oceanic theory, could hardly fail to speculate on the relations of the eastern and western parts of the earth as they knew it. Aristotle wrote: "They who maintain that Spain and India are separated simply by the sea do not appear to maintain an incredible notion." Strabo reports Eratosthenes as saying: "If the extent of the Atlantic Ocean did not prevent, it would be possible for us to sail from Spain to India along the same parallel." Strabo himself threw out this conjecture: "It is very possible that in the same temperate zone, near the parallel of Thinae or Athens, which passes through the Atlantic Ocean, besides the world we inhabit, there may be one or more other worlds peopled by beings different from ourselves." Seneca was still bolder: "In tardy years the epoch will come in which the ocean will unloose the bonds of nature, and the great earth will stretch out, and the sea will disclose new worlds; nor will Thule be the most remote on the globe." Such passages as these are valuable, not merely as constituting a part of the great store of Greek thought, but also as links in the chain of causes that finally led up to the great event which we commemorate.

In fact a plurality of worlds was rather a favorite idea of ancient men of science. It is conjectured that it was the thought of these other worlds that caused the great Alexander to weep because he had nothing more to conquer. Cicero at one time contemplated embodying current learned opinion in a work on geography. "Cicero's popularization of this doctrine of more *oikoumenai* than one," says Mr. Payne, "fell in with the ideas of the Augustan age. The dream of the Greek conqueror was transferred to the victorious people who had succeeded to his heritage. Poets sang of the worlds which still awaited the rule of the master of the *oikoumene*. Geographers boldly spoke of an *alter orbis* or second and new world." However it may have been with scientific interest, practical seamanship and economical and political needs were quite too feeble in that age to warrant attempts to test these notions.

It must not be supposed that the Greek geography was at any time generally accepted; the vulgar were still bound by the apparent

evidence of their senses to the disc or parallelogram theory; but men who were abreast of the scientific work of their time appear to have accepted its fundamental ideas as fully as the same class of men accept the current scientific theories of our own day.

With the final triumph of Christianity over heathenism, the Christian hierarchy took charge of the human mind. Pagan science, literature, and philosophy were placed under ban. The Middle Ages drew their dark mantle over Europe. In the great declension of knowledge that now ensued, perhaps no sciences suffered more than geography and astronomy. Whole regions of the earth fell out of sight; the *oikoumène* shrank up, and the old and crude theories of the earth were revived. In the Patristic Geography the "firmament" of Genesis, the "circle" of Isaiah, the "compass" of the Proverbs, the "tabernacle" of the letter to the Hebrews, the "foundations" and the "ends" of the earth, and "the running about of the sun," took the places of the ideas that the Greeks had deduced by long and careful observation. In the sixth century Cosmas Indicopleustes, an Alexandrian monk who had been a merchant and a traveler, wrote his famous "Christian Topography," which is at once a great delight to the curious and also a good example of Middle Age cosmography. Cosmas made the universe a box or chest, in the bottom of which, in the northern part, under the firmament, he placed a lofty conical mountain, around which the heavenly bodies revolve. In summer the sun wheels around the top of the cone, in the winter around the base, thus causing the long days and the short days of the two seasons. This system, established by demonstration from Divine Scriptures, it was not lawful for a Christian to doubt.

But by and by the clouds began to lift. The Saracens had a genius for science as well as for conquest, and they considerably widened the circle of geographical knowledge. The Jews also, traders and sojourners, made their contribution to the common stock. The Crusades revealed to the Western nations extensive regions of which before they knew little, and also threw open the portals to Central Asia, inviting the merchant and traveler to enter. Mission-

ary adventures were made into distant countries. In the annals of those times romance abounds, but perhaps there is nothing more romantic than the notion of Prester, or Presbyter, John, a fabled Christian king whom fancy sometimes placed in Africa and sometimes in Asia, but always beyond the verge of the known world, and to find whom persistent efforts were made. The Mongols, who under Genghis Khan and his successors established their power from eastern China to Poland, although barbarians, rather invited than repelled contact with Christendom. For a full century all Asia north of the great central east-and-west mountain ranges was thrown open to Western men. About the middle of the thirteenth century, two Franciscan monks, Friar John, sent by Innocent IV., and Rubruquis, sent by St. Louis, of France, made their way as far east as Karakorum, the capital of the Grand Khan, where they fell in with Chinese from whom they learned that Asia did not extend indefinitely eastward, as Ptolemy had taught, but was bounded by an ocean, and henceforth this knowledge had an important bearing on the course of events. A little past the middle of the same century, Nicolo and Maffeo Polo, Venetian merchants, made their way by Constantinople, the Crimea, the Volga, and Bokhara to the court of Kublai-Khan, who then danced before the eyes of living men as he now dances before the eyes of readers of romance, the same who did in Xanadu.

“A stately pleasure-dome decree.”

In 1269 the brothers returned home, charged with a message from the Khan to the Pope.

In 1271 the Polos undertook a second, and, as it turned out, a much more important journey to the same distant country, this time taking with them Marco Polo, son of Nicolo. Taking a more southern route than before, they reached their destination in 1275. Young Marco was soon established in the court of the Grand Khan, and attached to his person, while his father and uncle engaged in trade. Possessing an active intelligence, and moving here and there over the eastern parts of the Khan's empire, Marco's opportunities for gathering information were the best that could be desired. In 1292 the Polos started homeward, making their way by sea around

the Golden Chersonese, to the Persian Gulf, and thence overland to the Euxine, and then by the Bosphorus to Venice, where they had long been given up for dead. A few years later Marco Polo fell into the hands of the Genoese, and while languishing in prison he dictated to an amanuensis the wonderful story that is popularly known as "The Travels of Marco Polo." Sooner or later this book was published in the principal languages of Europe, and its marvelous tales of Cathay and Cipango, as China and Japan are called, not only made a deep impression upon men's minds, but were followed by great practical results. Even in our own day, great scholars have been glad to devote their learning to the elucidation of this book. Colonel Yule, the ablest of these, says "all other travellers of that time are but stars of a low magnitude beside the full orb of Marco Polo." Everything considered, he was the greatest traveler that ever lived. These three Venetians were the first Europeans to cross the continent of Asia, and to make a sea voyage around its southeastern projection. However, they were not the only Christians of those times, or indeed the first ones, to visit the Central parts of Asia; the fact is, such visits were by no means uncommon. Among the books that turned men's minds to the East in the ensuing age, Sir John Mandeville's strange mixture of truth and fiction should not be forgotten.

From an early time the Mediterranean and the Indian Seas were in commercial relations. The fleets of Solomon and Hiram sailed to Ophir and Tarshish, fetching thence gold and silver, ivory, apes, peacocks, almug trees, and precious stones. Much learning has been expended in efforts to identify Ophir and Tarshish; the first must have lain somewhere in the East, for it was reached from Ezion-Gebir, on the Red Sea. Herodotus celebrated the wealth and splendor of the Indies. All through the Macedonian and Roman periods Western men eagerly sought the wealth of Ormus and of Ind. The silks that the Romans of Virgil's time so much prized came from China, although the Romans knew nothing about the Chinese. It might be thought that commerce would have compelled a larger geographical knowledge, if it did not grow out of it; but we must remember that the Indian trade was carried on by an extensive

organization of middlemen and intermediate depots. In the Graeco-Roman period the channels of communication were three in number. One lay by the Bosphorus, the Euxine, and the Caspian to the Oxus, and thence to the Indus. A second ran up the Nile and across the desert to the Red Sea. The third crossed Syria and descended the Euphrates to the Persian Gulf. How rich was the commerce that flowed through these channels, the cities of Constantinople, Tyre, Palmyra, and Alexandria attest. In Mediaeval times the commercial cities of Italy were fed by the same feeding-pipes. Genoa seized the northern route, while Venice at different times monopolized the middle and the southern routes. Still, these cities were not terminal points; the Eastern products, flowing through the Alpine passes, reached Augsburg and Nuremberg, the Hanse Towns and the cities of Flanders. The policy of the Italian maritime cities was largely controlled by the silks and spices and gums of the East, the barbaric pearl and gold; and how directly their prosperity depended upon this commerce is shown by the fact that their decline dates from the time when their monopoly came to an end. In the inventory of the Indian commodities, we find aloes, balsam, sandal-wood, camphor, cinnamon, cardamon, cassia, cloves, cochineal, frankincense, ginger, gum-lac, indigo, ivory, laudanum, mastic, musk, mace, nutmegs, nutgalls, pearls, emeralds, turquoises, rubies, sapphires, diamonds, pepper, rhubarb, saffron, raw silk, porcelain, sugar, damask, gold and silver thread, samite, camlet and other cloths, and brazil wood, from which Brazil derives its name. To a great extent well-to-do Europeans came to regard these articles, not as luxuries, but as necessaries. Without spices, ginger, pepper, cloves, and cinnamon, the table lost half its pleasures. So long as the Phenicians, the Greeks, and the Romans controlled the channels of communication to the East, the westward flow of these articles had been practically unimpeded. Nor did the advent of the Mohammedan make much difference; the Saracen was a civilized man, thoroughly commercial in spirit and habit. But the Turk—the unspeakable Turk—was a barbarian bent on destruction; and when he got his clutches on the vast region extending from the Nile to the Hellespont, by his tolls and robberies he largely reduced the supply of Eastern products in

European markets and greatly enhanced prices. Thus, at the very time when Western men were finding themselves able to buy more of the coveted articles, they were confronted by a prospect of their total loss. Nor did this involve merely a denial of the pleasures of taste; it involved also the loss of a most lucrative commerce and of the resulting political, military, and naval power. It is said that as late as the early days of the East India Company, the profits of a voyage to the Eastern seas rarely fell below one hundred per cent., and that commonly they reached two hundred per cent.

The seizure of western Asia and of Egypt by the Turks co-incided with some important changes in the West,—as increase of wealth, quickening intelligence, growth of enterprise, and valuable practical improvements in navigation. The influence of the new discoveries in geography began to be felt. Emancipating themselves in part from theological subjects and the theological spirit, men began once more to cultivate natural knowledge with thorough zeal. A desire for direct sea-route communications with the East, not liable to interruptions, began to take hold of men's minds. And so some bold spirits began to ask whether the Oceanic theory or the Continental theory of the earth was the true one; or, more narrowly, whether there was not an outside route to the lands where silks and spices grew, where the sea-waves laved shores inlaid with mother of pearl, where diamond fields were rich and abundant, and where the rivers rolled their waters over shining dust. To find such a route to the gorgeous East was the master passion of the great period known in history as the Age of Maritime Discovery. Nor did the desire to bring the East and the West into closer relations expend itself in the discovery of the roads around the two great Capes; it is seen in the unavailing efforts to find northwest and northeast passages, and in our present railways and canals uniting the waters on the opposite sides of the continents.

Prince Henry of Portugal, fourth son of King John I. and Phillipa, daughter of John of Gaunt, was born in 1394. After winning a high reputation as a soldier and man of affairs, the Prince at an early age threw himself with ardor into the Eastern Question of

his time. Adopting the views thrown out by Pomponius Mela relating to the peninsular form of Africa, he raised for consideration and practical solution the problem of its circumnavigability. Besides reaching the Indies, the Prince hoped to divert the stream of gold that flowed from the Gold Coast by Timbuctoo and Tunis into Mohammedan hands, and also to enlarge the bounds of Mother Church. Establishing himself on the promontory of Sagres, the Sacred Promontory of antiquity, he founded an observatory and school of nautical science, into which he drew youths who desired to learn the mysteries of navigation. Mr. Major says of the Navigator, as Prince Henry is commonly called: "Until his day the pathway of the human race had been the mountain, the river, and the plain, the strait, the lake, and inland sea; but he it was who first conceived the thought of opening a road through the unexplored ocean, a road replete with danger but abundant in promise." Mr. Major says further: "If, from the pinnacle of our present knowledge, we mark on the world of waters those bright tracks which, during four centuries and a half, have led to the discovery of mighty continents, we shall find them all lead us back to that same inhospitable point of Sagres, and the motive which gave it a royal inhabitant."

The enterprise that the Prince now took in hand was fraught with peculiar difficulty and peril. First of all was the great question of the intercommunication of the two oceans. The terrors with which the Western imagination had long invested the Atlantic Ocean are well shown by one of its names, the Sea of Darkness. As to the torrid zone, the common opinion was expressed by Pliny: "The middle of the earth, on which is the path of the sun, is parched and set on fire by the luminary and is consumed by being so near the heat. "Whosoever passes Cape Non will return or not," was a current Portuguese proverb. Withal, the undertaking must necessarily entail great expenses.

It is neither possible nor necessary to follow the Portuguese captains as, one after another, they creep down the western coast of Africa. In 1418-1420 Porto Santo and Madeira were rediscovered. In 1435 Cape Bojador was passed. In 1460 the Prince died, but

not until he had made what was, in its inception, a personal undertaking a national one. The kings of Portugal, who were his near kinsmen, after some delay, began again to send expeditions down the coast. In 1471 the equator was crossed, in 1484 the mouth of the Congo reached, and in 1487 Dias reached what he called Stormy Cape, but what the King with more courage renamed Cape of Good Hope. In 1497 Da Gama awakened the wrathful vengeance of the Genius of the Cape; and, standing first to the northward along the eastern shore, and then eastward across the open ocean, finally dropped his anchors in the harbor of Calicut, a port on the Malabar coast, thus demonstrating the theories of Eratosthenes, Pomponius Mela, and Henry the Navigator.

But ancient writers had pointed out a Western sea-route to the Indies even more plainly than an Eastern one. What is more, in 1267 Roger Bacon made a collection of quotations from old writers with the view of showing that Spain and India were much less widely separated than was commonly thought; and in 1410 Pierre d' Ailly, Cardinal Bishop of Cambray, copied these quotations into his "*Imago Mundi*," one of the famous books of the fifteenth century. Mr. Lowell makes Columbus say, in recounting the sources of his faith:

"For I believed the poets; it is they  
Who utter wisdom from the central deep,  
And, listening to the inner flow of things,  
Speak to the age out of eternity."

Certainly the poets occupied themselves with the theme. Dante makes Ulysses, at the Pillars of Hercules, exhort his companions not to deny the unpeopled world, and Pulei makes the Devil confute the old theory that these Pillars are the western limit of the earth.

"Know that this theory is false; his bark  
The daring mariner shall urge far o'er  
The western wave, a smooth and level plain,  
Albeit the earth is fashioned like a wheel.  
Man was in ancient days of grosser mould,  
And Hercules might blush to learn how far  
Beyond the limits he had vainly set,  
The dullest sea-boat soon shall wing her way.

Men shall deserv another hemisphere,  
 Since to one common center all things tend;  
 So earth, by curious mystery divine  
 Well balanced, hangs amid the starry spheres.  
 At our Antipodes are cities, states,  
 And thronged empires, ne'er divined of yore.  
 But see, the Sun speeds on his western path  
 To glad the nations with expected light."<sup>1</sup>

Through a member of his court, King Alfonso V., of Portugal, applied to Toscanelli, the venerable Florentine astronomer, to know whether he could not recommend to him a shorter road to the East than the one in course of prosecution on the African coast. Toscanelli replied on June 25, 1474, stating that he had formerly spoken to his correspondent about such a road. This route lay to the west across the Atlantic, and was exhibited on the sailing chart, made by the astronomer's own hand, accompanying the letter. "Do not wonder," he said, "at my calling west the parts where the spieces are, whereas they are commonly called east, because to persons sailing persistently westward those parts will be found by courses on the under side of the earth." Unfortunately, there is no known copy of this map; but it is not difficult to reproduce it in substance, because, first, the description found in the letter is quite full, and, secondly, some years later Martin Behaim, in constructing the celebrated Nuremberg globe, sometimes called "The World Apple," appears to have followed it in laying down the waters and islands off the eastern coast of Asia. In these details, however, Toscanelli did little more than copy from Marco Polo. Why the King wrote to Toscanelli, and why he dropped the subject on receiving so favorable an answer, we can only conjecture. The correspondence is extremely important because it shows that the King was not wholly absorbed in the African enterprise, but mainly because it contains the first practical suggestion ever made, so far as we know, for reaching the East by sailing into the West.

The historical critics have long been very busy with Christopher Columbus, and there is hardly a fact in relation to him which has not been challenged. By his own testimony the city of Genoa was

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<sup>1</sup>See Prescott's *Ferdinand and Isabella II*, 117.

the place of his nativity, but the same testimony is not decisive as to the time. It is pretty certain that he was born in 1436 or 1446, the scale, inclining, perhaps toward the first of these dates. His father was a weaver, or wool-comber, a member of the burgher class, and always involved in financial difficulties. Of the Discoverer's youth we know very little. For a time he seems to have followed the same trade as his father. We cannot tell when he turned his attention to the sea. Mr. Lowell causes him to say:

"..... from my boyhood up I loved to hear  
The tall pine-forests of the Appenine  
Murmur their hoary legends of the sea."

and well may it have been so. Neither do we know the extent of his attainments in learning and science. Sir Arthur Helps remarks that "the greatest geographical discoveries have been made by men conversant with the book knowledge of their own time," and this was true of Columbus. He wrote Latin, studied geography carefully, picked up some acquaintance with astronomy and mathematics, and became an expert draughtsman. It was perfectly natural that he should adopt maritime pursuits. Relatively at least the greatest days of Venice and Genoa had already passed, and the Western states, especially Portugal, were assuming new prominence; but the Italians still surpassed all competitors in the science and art of navigation. Witness the list of Italians who distinguished themselves under foreign flags in the Maritime Age: Cadamosto, the two Cabots, Vespuceus, Verrazano, and Columbus. In the fifteenth century an enterprising Genoese sought his fortune on the sea as naturally as, in the twelfth century, an adventurous knight-errant sought his in the Holy Land.

From the days of Prince Henry, Portugal held out attractions to adventurous seafaring men not found in any other country. Drawn by these attractions, no doubt, Columbus made his way to Lisbon about 1472, where his younger brother Bartholomew had already preceded him. In 1473 he married Phillipa, daughter of a distinguished Italian navigator, Bartholomew Perestrello, whom Prince Henry had once made governor of Porto Santo, an island which lies but a little to one side of the route to the Cape. On the

same island Columbus appears to have lived with his wife, making good use of the sailing charts and nautical memoranda that his father-in-law had left behind him on his death. Here it was, as some have thought, but without the slightest proof, that he conceived the great purpose with which his name is identified. He soon removed to Lisbon, where he devoted his time mainly to map-making and to sea voyages. He tells us that more than once he sailed in the Portuguese ships that were prosecuting Prince Henry's errand, and that he also made a voyage into the far Northern seas. We must not lose sight of this connection of Columbus with the Portuguese voyages. After calling the discovery of America an achievement which formed the connecting link between the old world and the new, Mr. Major says "the explorations instituted by Prince Henry of Portugal were in truth the anvil upon which that link was forged."

One of the unfortunate facts in the life of Columbus is that we cannot certainly tell the time when he formed his plan of a Western voyage. The earliest document showing that he was considering the subject is a letter written to him by Toscanelli, in answer to a request for information. It is undated. This letter was written, however, posterior to 1474, for the major part of it is a transcript of the letter dispatched by the Florentine to King Alfonso in that year. Toscanelli also sends a duplicate of the map that he had sent to the King. Toscanelli recognizes his "great and noble desire" to go to "the place where the spices grow," and in a later letter commends as "noble and grand" Columbus's project of "sailing from east to west, according to the indications furnished by the map." "For these reasons and many others that might be mentioned," he says, after a summary of arguments, "I do not wonder that you who are of great courage, and the whole Portuguese nation, which always had men distinguished in all such enterprises, are now influenced with a desire to execute the said voyage." These letters prove that Columbus had now matured a project, and that there was a probability of its being soon tested. "I am much pleased to see," remarks the astronomer, "that I have been well understood, and that the voyage has become not only possible but

certain." This hope was not, however, to be realized. Few documents relating to the subject are more valuable than these letters, and it is matter of regret that we cannot fix their dates.

Ferdinand Columbus informs us that his father was convinced of the feasibility of his project by these arguments: (1) Natural reason, or conclusions drawn from science; (2) authority of writers, amounting to little more than speculations of the ancients; (3) testimony of sailors, comprehending in addition to popular rumors of lands discovered in Western voyages, such relies as appeared to have floated to the European shores from the other side of the Atlantic.<sup>1</sup> Further on we shall see in what the originality of Columbus consisted; here it is important to comment upon his relations to Toscanelli.

It is perfectly clear that the eminent Florentine astronomer did not obtain his ideas from Columbus. But whether the Genoese formed the project of a voyage into the West independently, or borrowed it from Florence, there is small reason to think that we shall ever know. It is possible that King Alfonso applied to Toscanelli for information on the suggestion of Columbus, but it is improbable. It is certain that Toscanelli had discussed the subject with Martinez, the member of the court referred to, before 1474, and the idea may have drifted from their correspondence into Columbus's mind. But granting that Columbus struck out the plan for himself, we must not overlook the fact that he resorted to Florence for information to clear up his own mind or to convince skeptics, or for both reasons, and that he carried Toscanelli's sailing-chart with him on his first voyage.

There is no dispute that Columbus studied with utmost care whatever he could find relating to the subject that came to absorb all his thoughts. He read Marco Polo and lived in societies that were saturated with his famous book. He thumbed and rethumbed the "*Imago Mundi*," carried it with him to sea, and covered his own well-worn copy over with annotations. It is interesting to know, by the way, that this particular copy has been preserved; it

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<sup>1</sup> Prescott: *Ferdinand and Isabella II*, 116.

is at Seville, one of the most curious and valuable documents found in the Biblioteca Columbina. He dwelt fondly also upon the passage in the fourth book of Esdras that makes the earth six parts land and one water, a fact that throws light upon his great blunder as to the distance separating Spain and Cathay, and also shows that his mind was by no means emancipated from authority. Then the mythical islands that men scattered on the surface of the Western Sea had a certain influence on his mind.

Our American poet makes Columbus hear Biarne's keel

"Crunch the gray pebbles of the Vinland shore,"

and Scandinavian scholars, inspired by patriotism, discover the more important antecedents of his voyage in the far North. It seems highly probable that the Northmen made their way by Iceland and Greenland to the American coast about the beginning of the eleventh century, and that there were occasional communications between Scandinavia and America for a century and more; but it is perfectly certain that these adventurers never dreamed that they had sailed beyond the confines of Europe, that their voyages made little if any impression on the Southern nations, and that they were finally forgotten even in the North, left buried for centuries in the heap of the Norse Sagas. Nor is there the slightest evidence that Columbus ever heard of these voyages, or that they would have had the slightest practical interest for his mind, since they were not at all in the line of his ideas; on the other hand, his conduct refutes the theory of Norse influence.

Columbus made a determined effort to enlist the King of Portugal in his plan. For obvious reasons, that monarch, above all others, should have been the man to listen to him with consideration, but for reasons that are not altogether clear he finally rejected the overture. Disappointed where he had most reason to expect success, Columbus now made his way to Spain.

At the close of 1484, when he is supposed to have arrived, Catholic Spain was in the throes of the final struggle with Mohammedan Spain, and the revenues of their Majesties were all devoted to the prosecution of the war. Columbus's project was a greater

novelty here than it had been in Portugal, for the larger kingdom was quite in the rear of the smaller one in maritime development. Some wiseacres objected that the very novelty of the scheme condemned it. The Patristic geography was duly produced; the old Biblical texts and quotations from the Fathers were all brought out of the armory and refurbished. Two years after his arrival, the Genoese was admitted to the service of Ferdinand and Isabella, and for several years his ideas were more or less under consideration. Sometimes an attaché of the Court, sometimes a soldier in the camp, sometimes an intercessor at the door of some great nobleman or powerful ecclesiastic, he urged his suit with a zeal and steadfastness that made him a world's example. But all to no immediate purpose. Slowly, however, he won over to his side several influential persons—the Duke of Medina-Celi; Juan Perez, at one time the Queen's father confessor; Deza and Talavera, the Royal confessors; Mendoza, Archbishop of Toledo, and Quintanilla and Santangel, the Royal treasurers, and also some ladies of high esteem at Court. At last Isabella, to whom Columbus especially looked for favor, promised to give the subject serious attention as soon as the war should come to an end. In January, 1492, Grenada surrendered, the unfortunate Boabdil heaved "the last sigh of the Moor," and the Queen declared herself ready to fulfill her promise.

New difficulties now arose. The conditions that Columbus made were of such a nature that even Talavera advised the Queen to reject them. The negotiations were broken off promptly, and apparently forever. Columbus, well aware that he had no time to lose, mounted his mule and rode out of Grenada resolved to transfer his quest to France. As the walls of the Moorish city receded behind him, Santangel made a final and effective appeal to Isabella; a courier mounted on a swift horse was dispatched to bring Columbus back to the Court; Ferdinand was finally won over, an agreement was arrived at, and the necessary papers were duly executed.

These are the principal articles of the contract, signed at Santa Fé by the King and Queen April 17, as formulated by Irving:

"1. That Columbus should have for himself during his life, and for his heirs and successors forever, the office of Admiral in all

the lands and continents which he might discover or acquire in the ocean, with similar honors and prerogatives to those enjoyed by the high admiral of Castile in his district.

"2. That he should be viceroy and governor-general over all the said lands and continents, with the privilege of nominating three candidates for the government of each island or province, one of whom should be selected by the sovereigns.

"3. That he should be entitled to reserve for himself one tenth of all pearls, precious stones, gold, silver, spices, and all other articles and merchandises, in whatever manner found, bought, bartered, or gained within his admiralty, the costs being first deducted.

"4. That he or his lieutenant should be the sole judge in all causes and disputes arising out of traffic between those countries and Spain, provided the high admiral of Castile had similar jurisdiction in his district.

"5. That he might then and at all after times contribute an eighth part of the expense in fitting out vessels to sail on this enterprise, and receive an eighth part of the profits."

Another document, executed April 30, conferred the title of Don upon Columbus, his heirs and successors.

The scenes now change; the map-maker and projector becomes the discoverer and the founder. On Friday, August 3, 1492, having placed his voyage under the protection of the Holy Trinity, he sailed from Palos, and on Friday, October 12, made his land-fall. All these religious items have been carefully pressed into service by the Catholic coterie who advocate his canonization. After spending many weeks in the Western seas and discovering many islands, including Hayti and Cuba, he returned to Spain in March, 1493, to receive such honors as kings bestow upon the favorites of fortune. American history had begun.

It is not necessary to deal with Columbus's later history. An old Greek could desire no better proof of the doctrine of Nemesis than his life; his serious troubles date from the culmination of his career, and continue to multiply until he dies poor and

neglected in Valladolid, in 1506. As still further illustrations of the uncertainties hanging over his life, we may mention that the identity of the island that the Indians called Guanahani and he San Salvador is warmly disputed; that it is uncertain whether his ashes rest in San Domingo or in Havana, and that of all the numerous portraits of him not one is admitted to be authentic.

A thousand times has the failure to call by his name the world to which Columbus piloted the way, been declared a grievous wrong. Had such a suggestion been made to him, he would have repelled it with passionate warmth. He interpreted everything that he and others discovered in the West in the light of his own strong prepossessions. He had brooded on Asia, he sailed for Asia, his great plans turned on Asia, and it was Asia that he had found. To listen to anything else would have been treason to the passion of his life. Some facts confirmed his prepossessions. He found the Bahamas and the Antilles in about the longitude where he expected to find the Asiatic coast and the islands skirting it. He promptly identified Hispaniola as Cipango, and on his second voyage, having followed the southern shore of Cuba a long distance without finding an end, that he might convince the gainsayers at home, he caused his crews to take an oath that the island was the mainland of Asia. It was in this faith that he called the countries which he found The Indies, the natives, Indians. He had sought what he did not find; he had found what he did not seek. We know that his failure was a far grander triumph than his success could have been, but this thought lay below the horizon of his day. How pathetic it is to find him writing not long before his death: "If any-one does not give me credit for having discovered the remaining parts of India, it simply arises from personal hostility."

But we must not think Columbus blinder than others. Asia had completely enthralled the men of that age, and they could see no other vision when they looked into the West. History is full of examples, including both the Cabots, and explorers as late as John Smith, Henry Hudson, and La Salle. John Cabot thought that he had landed in the territory of the Grand Kahn; he had landed in

the region of the St. Lawrence. Nor must we forget the difficulty of the task in hand. When the first Western discoveries were made, men did not know the size of the earth or the eastward extension of Asia, and the ablest geographers could not reasonably be expected to co-ordinate the islands and shores that were found by a hundred navigators, here and there, often separated by long stretches of water or land of which they were wholly ignorant. As intimated in the beginning, Columbus did not on October 12, 1492, really discover America; what he did was to perform the first act in the long series that constitute such discovery. Many ships sailed, many landfalls were made, and much new knowledge was gathered and co-ordinated before an idea of the New World could begin to form in the minds of men. The man who named America did not know what he was naming any more than Columbus knew what he was discovering; and it was not until Magellan had crossed the Pacific that the new discoveries could be seen in anything like their true relations. The slow emergence of America from the Sea of Darkness, which can be fully understood only by one who has looked carefully into the history of American cartography, is the best possible illustration of the enormous difficulty attending the organization of a mass of new facts by ardent men whose minds are filled with a false hypothesis. Thoroughly to cast Asia out of the map of the Western Hemisphere was the work of two hundred years.

Americus Vespuelius was long supposed to have robbed Columbus of the honor that was his due. This is now known to be a baseless charge. Without attempting to guess the Vespuelian riddle, which is, perhaps, the most perplexing in the history of Western explorations, we may state the main facts in relation to the baptism of the New World.

In April or May, 1503, Vespuelius wrote a letter to Lorenzo d'Medici, giving an account of his voyage of 1501-2, the so-called third of the Vespuelian voyages, in which he had followed the South American coast far to the south of Cape San Roque. Deeply impressed by the lands that he had visited, which lay wholly outside of the range of ancient ideas or of recent discoveries, he thought it

proper to call them a new world. The translator and editor of a Latin version of this letter that appeared at the beginning of the next year, caught up these words and made them the title of the little pamphlet, "Mundus Novus." Numerous editions of this tract were published in different languages, and among others a Latin edition at Strasburg, in 1505, under the editorship of a young man whom we shall soon have occasion to mention again. In September, 1504, Vespuelius wrote a letter to Soderini, a magistrate of Florence and an old school fellow, in which he gave a rough outline of his four voyages. This letter was published in Florence, July, 1506.

At the time with which we are dealing there was a small group of scholars, sometimes called an academy or college, clustered around a printing press in Saint Dié, in the Vosges Mountains, the very place, strangely enough, where Pierre d'Ailly had written his "Imago Mundi." While these scholars were employed upon a new edition of Ptolemy, there was brought to them a French copy of Vespuelius's letter to Soderini, which was at once handed over to Martin Waldseemüller and Matthias Ringman, who were more especially charged with the work, to be used as material. Ringman was the man who had brought out the Strasburg edition of the letter to Lorenzo, and was therefore already familiar with the idea of a new world. Too impatient to await the tardy appearance of the Ptolemy, the two scholars executed a work that they named "Cosmographiae Introductio." This was a palpable case of book-making; the work, consisting of 52 leaves, contained a simple treatise on cosmography and the full text of the letter to Soderini. The last chapter of the original part of the work, following descriptions of Asia, Europe, and Africa, as the three grand divisions of the earth as taught by Ptolemy, contained this pregnant sentence:

"But now these parts have been more extensively explored and another fourth part has been discovered by Americus Vespuelius as will appear in what follows: wherefore I do not see what is rightly to hinder us from calling it AMERIGE OR AMERICA, i. e., the land of Americus, after its discoverer Americus, a man of sagacious

mind, since both Europe and Asia have got their names from women.”<sup>1</sup>

The “Cosmographiae Introductio” was published in 1507, and attained a considerable circulation. Its principal author, Waldseemüller, who, according to the prevailing fashion of the times, renamed himself Hylaeomylus, baptized America. “But for these seven lines,” says Mr. Harisse, “written by an obscure geographer in the Vosges, the Western Hemisphere might have been called The Land of the Holy Cross, or Atlantis, or Iberia, or New India, or simply The Indies, as it is designated officially in Spain to-day.” In fact, a part of the land thus named had already received the first of these titles.

We must not suppose that the Saint-Dié scholar dreamed what he was doing. He intended merely to call a part of the country that we know as Brazil, America. The name was soon expanded. On John Ruysch’s map of 1508 so much of South America as appears is called Terra Sanctæ Crucis, sive Mundus Novus, while the discoveries that had been made in the north are represented as appendages of Asia; on the map assigned to Leonardo da Vinci, about 1514, America takes the place of this double designation, and on Mercator’s projection, 1541, Labrador, Nova Scotia, Florida, Mexico, and Mundus Novus are connected by continuous, though very inaccurate coast lines, making a continent wholly distinct and separate from Asia, while, as if to solemnize the marriage, the first three letters of the name AMERICA, now given to the whole continent, are placed above the site of Lake Superior, and the last four west of the River Plate.

Most unfortunately, the controversies about the Great Admiral have involved his character and his life. The historical critics have been as busy with the man as with his story. Neither by nature nor by acquired habit was Washington Irving a critical historian;

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<sup>1</sup>Nunc vero et hae partes sunt latius lustratae et alia quarta pars per Americum Vesputium (ut in sequentibus audietur) inventa est quam non video cur quis jure vetet ab Americo inventore sagacis ingenii viro Amerigen, quasi Americi terram, sive Americam dicendam, cum et Europa et Asia a mulieribus sua sortita sint nomina.

he believed that erudition might even become pernicious; he believed more in the Muse of History than in the Science of History; he thought the exemplars of the world worth preserving; he deprecated casting the demi-gods down from their high places: and of all his heroes perhaps Columbus most powerfully impressed his imagination. It is from his glowing pages that a great majority of Americans have derived their ideas of the Discoverer. With all deference to Mr. Irving and his theories of history, we must admit that he has overdrawn the picture. A living American scholar who has written one of the learned works called out by the Centenary, tends far toward the other extreme. Mr. Fiske does full justice to Mr. Winsor's "*Christopher Columbus*" when he separates "between his contributions toward a correct statement of the difficult geographical questions connected with the subject," which he calls "the work of an acknowledged master in his chosen field," and his biographical estimate of the man. "No one can deny," says Mr. Fiske, "that Las Casas was a keen judge of men, or that his standard of right and wrong was quite as lofty as any one has reached in our own time. He had a much more intimate knowledge of Columbus than any modern historian can ever hope to acquire, and he always speaks of him with warm admiration and respect. But how could Las Casas ever have respected the feeble, mean-spirited driveller whose portrait Mr. Winsor asks us to accept as that of the Discoverer of America?" Still, Columbus was not one of the few men, if indeed there be a few, who can challenge measurement by the standard of the ages. While he was in advance of his time, he yet craves judgment in many things by its canons.

It is charged that he was avaricious and greedy of power. It must be admitted that in the negotiations at Granada, he does not appear as a single-minded devotee of science, content to find his reward in the solution of a problem of the centuries. But on this very point Las Casas warmly commends him for his "great constancy and loftiness of soul." We must remember that Columbus was looking to another and, to him, higher end than a new road to Eastern Asia. In the grand vision that filled his brain, the Western

voyage was subordinate to a new attempt to recover the Holy Places from the infidel. So completely was he under the dominion of mystical ideas, that he did not know that the days of the Crusaders were over. He regarded himself as God's chosen agent for enlarging the realm of the true faith, and especially for the recovery of the Holy Sepulcher; the thought is present with him in all his negotiations; it lights up his eye as he walks the deck of his caravel at midnight; he makes a solemn vow that, if he is successful, he will himself organize a crusade of fifty thousand foot and four thousand horse; and in his last will and testament, written at Valladolid when he is old and poor and friendless, he commands his son, if ever he should recover his lost rights, to carry out the purpose that has lain so heavy upon his father's heart. We should remember, too, that the scientific impulse was weak in those days compared with ours; the working force in the Age of Discovery was far less the scientific spirit than practical advantage. Indeed, it can not be said that that spirit was, so far as kings and princesses were concerned, an appreciable quantity. For the rest, we may admit that the Discoverer of America was not superior to

“That last infirmity of noble mind.”

Sometimes the atrocious system that led to the enslavement and extermination of the Indians is laid at Columbus's door. This charge we cannot examine save in a single feature. It would appear plain that this system was engendered by causes and conditions lying deep in the civilization of the time, and largely beyond the control of any single mind. At the close of the fifteenth century, the line separating believers and infidels was sharply drawn, and the idea that true religion can be propagated only by persuasion still lay below the spiritual horizon of men. In the long struggle between the Cross and the Crescent, the Spanish temper had been whetted to the sharpest edge. Ecclesiastics taught that America was the new Land of Promise, and that Christians adventuring into it might emulate Israel under the lead of Joshua. For the pursuit of the poor savage of Hispaniola and Cuba, the bloodhound surpassed the Spaniard only in fleetness and keenness of scent. Moreover, the colonists were of a very heterogenous character; idleness, arrogance,

turbulence, avarice, impatience of control by a foreigner, and extravagant expectations abounded in the new colony. Had Mr. Winsor placed due stress on these facts, he would perhaps have hesitated to say in his final summary that Columbus might have been the father of the New World, and could have made its youth benignant.

As to slavery, the ideas and practices of the time are well known. Both Christian and Mohammedan captains depended upon slaves to propel their galleys, and long years after Columbus the slavery of the oar was one of the most revolting forms of the strife between Catholic and Protestant. Prince Henry, whose nobility of mind is not doubted, sanctioned the enslaving of negroes, thus making himself privy to that form of slavery which has left the most serious vices in civilization. Even the humane Las Casas consented to the substitution of the African slave for the Indian. Magellan lost his life in a battle fought to compel a heathen king to become a Christian. Sir John Hawkins, who did so much to promote the greatness of England, traded in slaves to the Guinea Coast. Sir Francis Drake, whose body, to our regret, lies in the sea rather than under the pavement of Westminster, waged cruel war upon Spaniards in a time of public peace, and Queen Elizabeth was a silent partner in his voyages. By the *Assiento* of 1713, Queen Anne, through her licensed agents, became the sole slave-trader to Spanish America and the English Colonies, binding herself to bring 144,000 negroes into the dominions of His Catholic Majesty in thirty years. But the recital becomes flat, stale, and unprofitable.

No doubt Columbus's claim to be the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth, spoken of in Isaiah and in the Apocalypse, was something more than the common claim to providential guidance. He was not a cool, calculating, well-balanced philosopher or man of affairs, but a prophet and a crusader. He was born a mystic, he lived in the midst of mystical ideas, and he became more and more mystical as his years and infirmities grew and his disappointments and humiliations increased. He was not alone in the view that he entertained of his mission. Ferdinand Columbus, who was a learned scholar, thought his father's name was a token of

his being ordained "to carry the olive branch and oil of baptism over the ocean, like Noah's dove, to denote the peace and union of the heathen with the Church after they had been shut up in the ark of darkness and confusion." We cannot condemn the Genoese for his visions, extasies, and fanaticisms without condemning scores of men whom the world delights to honor. Of one thing we may be certain; but for his exalted mental temperament he never would have discovered America. If Godfrey and his companions had not been capable of believing that the monks had found the spear which pierced the Savior's side, they would never have planted the banner of the Cross on the walls of Jerusalem.

Columbus was not a great statesman, financier, or man of science. He did not originate the idea of the earth's sphericity, or demonstrate its truth. He was not the first to deduce from this idea the conclusion that somewhere the ends of the earth meet. He did not make the first, or even the best, estimate of the expanse of longitude separating Spain from Cathay. He was not the first man to suggest the possibility of finding the East in the West. All these ideas were more or less current in European seaports before he landed on the quays of Lisbon. He did not even understand what he had accomplished. At the mouth of the Orinoco he entertained for a moment the idea of a new continent, but only to fling it from him. It is, however, perfectly easy to state in what his greatness consisted. He united the scientific insight, the religious ardor, the sanguine temperament, the power of persuasion, the practical seamanship, which the solution of the old problem demanded. He took up the Western sea-route as a practical problem and devoted his life to its solution; in journeyings often, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings and denials, in contempt and contumely, he prosecuted this solution until he persuaded the Spanish monarchs to give him an opportunity; and, once embarked upon the ocean, he held on his way, despite the fears and murmurs of his crews, until he had reached the borders of the New World and taught his successors to find the rest. His originality was in achievement. If he did not think the thought, he did the deed.

The longer the time that elapses, the greater his achievement is seen to be. It added sixteen millions of square miles to the area of the earth and to the resources of civilization, capable of sustaining a population of many hundreds of millions of people. The mines and forests, the waters, mountains, and plains contribute rich and new elements to the service of man. The natural philosopher finds the most abundant materials for the enrichment of science. Spaniards, Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Dutchmen flock into the new regions, to develope their civilization under virgin conditions, and afterwards to be re-enforced by every people of Europe. The new populations, finding an embarrassment of natural agents at their command, and stimulated in all their faculties, swell the burden of the world's productions and wealth beyond the measure of their numbers. Not only do the new peoples attain to a high standard of living themselves, but they contribute to raise the level in the Old World. Thus, an elevation of the sphere of life becomes co-incident with its enlargement. The great commerce, henceforth disdaining narrow waters, spreads its wings on the great oceans, where the new conditions, as greater distance and stormier seas, compel incalculable improvements in the art of navigation. Both the range and the volume of exchanges are wonderfully expanded. Colonization brings the maritime nations into new relations, first with the savages and then with one another; and out of these relations are evolved important principles of public law, as the rule called the Right of Discovery. Nor is this all; the letting loose of the fleets of the world under the competition of a growing commerce raises the question of the ownership of the ocean, and this leads, by the use of sword and pen, to the establishment of the broad maxim that the high seas are the common highways of nations, and also to the development of a large body of law regulating maritime rights and duties. Within the commonwealths planted by England, it soon becomes apparent that men will not move forever in their Old World grooves. Government takes on new forms and is based on new principles. Individual liberty is enlarged at the same time that social order is secured. Theology and ecclesiastical discipline assume kindlier forms, and

the principle of a free church in a free state is established. Popular education is laid upon broad and deep foundations, and progressively the conclusion is worked out that, learn as we may from Europe, American education cannot be cramped within the limits of the Prussian ideas, but must find broader scope and freer expression. A civilization is developed that, in many of its aspects, is the marvel of history. Moreover, these larger and freer tendencies reach beyond our own borders, assisting to affect important changes in both American continents, and going to swell the tide of democratizing influence that is so powerfully affecting society in the Old World.

In view of its results, we need not hesitate to place the discovery of America first in the list of great secular transactions. It is easy to say that this discovery was a blunder, that it would soon have been made by another if not by Columbus, and that he had no idea of its significance; but the august tribunal of history denies all such motions in abatement of honor made at her bar by special pleaders. Columbus showed great qualities in a great enterprise, and his fame is perfectly secure. He led the way across the Sea of Darkness. He opened the portals of the Western Hemisphere, not to Castile and Leon only, but to humanity. Four hundred years ago the American pageant began to move. Then it consisted of three small Spanish caravels, their officers and crews. Now it consists of twenty nations and a hundred and twenty millions of people. The man who stood at the head then by his own choice, stands at the head to-day by the common consent of mankind; and when four hundred more years have passed, and the pageant has assumed proportions yet grander and more imposing, he will still maintain his place.









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